

VZCZCXYZ0000  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTV #0824/01 0750923  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 160923Z MAR 07  
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0035  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAHQA/HQ USAF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEADWD/DA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUENAAA/CNO WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 1823  
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 8575  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 1751  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2638  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 1813  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 9614  
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 2547  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 9466  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 9941  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 6557  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 3953  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 8832  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 3049  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4968  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 6252  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000824

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA  
HQ USAF FOR XXXX  
DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA  
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO

SIPDIS  
E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

-----  
SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
-----

1. Mideast
2. Iraq

-----  
Key stories in the media:  
-----

Ha'aretz reported that on Wednesday FM Livni discussed with  
Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice ways to respond to the formation

SIPDIS

of a Palestinian unity government and that Arab peace initiative. Ha'aretz reported that Secretary Rice expressed the "need for an Israeli-Arab reconciliation to accompany ... the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," which Ha'aretz said was a view shared by Livni. The Jerusalem Post and other media quoted Rice as saying during her meeting with Livni: "I have not talked to people about modification [of the Saudi initiative]. I think it's a favorable thing that they are putting forward something, but ... it's not a negotiating position as I understand it, but rather a framework, a vision for how Israel and the Arabs might reconcile."

Media said that Israel was quick to reject the new Palestinian government, which will be sworn in on Saturday, because its platform does not explicitly recognize Israel's right to exist. Ha'aretz quoted the Prime Minister's Office as saying on Thursday that the platform of the new Palestinian unity government is a step backward from the peace process and "flies in the face" of the international community's demands. The Jerusalem Post quoted senior GOI officials as saying on Thursday that reviving the idea of unilateral withdrawal is one of the options being considered inside the Prime Minister's Office in the wake of the formation of a PA unity government whose platform Israel views as intransigent. The officials were quoted as saying that PM Ehud Olmert did not believe that Israel can afford to remain at a diplomatic standstill and that if there were no Palestinian government with which to negotiate a two-state solution, Israel once again must begin drawing borders on its own. The Jerusalem Post quoted Olmert's spokeswoman Miri Eisin as saying: "We won't even deal with or recognize members of the government whom we have dealt with in the past." Major media quoted David Baker, spokesman for the Prime Minister's Office, as saying: "Instead of recognizing Israel and renouncing terror, the emerging Palestinian government has decided to spring backwards." "This is not what we were hoping for and flies in the face of the international community's demands of the Palestinians. Once again, they haven't provided the goods," he added. Ha'aretz reported that Israel urged the Quartet to maintain the aid embargo imposed on the Palestinian government following the electoral victory of Hamas, unless it fulfilled the Quartet's three preconditions. Ha'aretz said that the unity deal instead refers vaguely to respect for peace agreements and affirms the Palestinians' right to resist and defend themselves against Israeli aggression, though it also calls for maintaining and expanding a truce with Israel.

The media reported that on Thursday the PA announcement on the formation of a national unity government was received with varied reactions from world leaders. Ha'aretz quoted White House Press Secretary Tony Snow as saying: "Our position has been consistent,

SIPDIS

which is, you need a Palestinian government that is going to, in fact, abide by the Quartet conditions." Yediot quoted diplomatic sources in the EU as saying in Brussels on Thursday that Europe will resume its assistance to the PA, following the formations of the new Palestinian government. Ha'aretz noted that France intends to support the new Palestinian government and will cooperate with it, according to PA foreign minister-designate Ziad Abu Amar. Abu Amar was quoted as saying that French FM Philippe Douste-Blazy invited him to a meeting in Paris and informed him that he hoped "a new page in the relations between the Hamas government and the international community" could begin. Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that, speaking to reporters Thursday, EU spokeswoman Emma Udwin said that the European Commission had not yet assessed the new government's program. Ha'aretz wrote that in Moscow, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin welcomed the development. "It is inarguably an important event in terms of consolidation of the Palestinian ranks," he was quoted as saying in a statement, noting that the Mecca Agreement took into account the Quartet conditions.

Ha'aretz quoted PM Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas as saying that he hoped the new Palestinian government would launch a new era for the Palestinians, putting an end to bloody Palestinian infighting while satisfying international demands and improving the Palestinian image in advance of the March 28-29 Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia. The Jerusalem Post reported that Haniyeh announced on Thursday that the PA unity government enjoys the backing of the Arabs and Europeans.

Ha'aretz reported that, in a live video speech to AIPAC on Tuesday, Olmert spoke out strongly against a rapid US exit from Iraq. Olmert was saying that Israel is worried that a hasty US withdrawal from Iraq could topple the Hashemite regime in Jordan. Ha'aretz quoted senior GOI officials as saying later that Olmert was expressing his opinion "solely on the professional aspect" of a pullout and insisted, as did Olmert in his speech, that Israel has no interest in getting involved in America's domestic political dispute over Iraq. Nevertheless, Ha'aretz said that the official Israeli position as expressed by Olmert contradicts the views of a majority of Americans, who favor a speedy pullout. Ha'aretz wrote that Olmert spoke out publicly in part due to an assessment he has received from the security services, who say a US withdrawal from Iraq before that country has stabilized would have immediate repercussions on the domestic situation in Jordan. These effects could even threaten the stability of the Hashemite monarchy. Israel views Jordan as a strategic asset whose stability is a vital Israeli interest. However, Ha'aretz said that Israel is not concerned solely about Jordan's fate; it fears that stability throughout the region would be undermined if the United States is viewed as having lost to the extremists. "Those who are concerned for Israel's security, for the security of the Gulf states and for the stability of the entire Middle East should recognize the need for American success in Iraq, and a responsible exit," Olmert told the AIPAC conference. Ha'aretz reported that one day earlier, FM Tzipi Livni told AIPAC that "in a region where impressions are important, countries must be careful not to demonstrate weakness and surrender to extremists ... It is [also] true for Iraq." The daily reported that Defense Minister Amir Peretz, who met in Washington this week with Defense Secretary Robert Gates and several senior senators, expressed a similar view. Ha'aretz reported that Olmert, explaining his position to a visiting delegation from the American Jewish Committee the day after his AIPAC speech, said the question of why America began the war in Iraq is currently secondary. What matters, he argued, is that given the present state of affairs in Iraq, if America were to leave now, it would lose its authority throughout the Middle East. Ha'aretz wrote that on Thursday Olmert urged a visiting delegation of leaders of the Reform Movement to reconsider a motion urging the USG to set a firm timetable for an American withdrawal from Iraq. The movement's executive, representing some 700 Reform congregations across the US, approved the motion by a large majority earlier this week. Olmert reportedly reiterated his argument that a hasty withdrawal could endanger Israel's security as well as efforts to halt Iran's nuclear program. But Ha'aretz reported that the Reform leaders turned down his request, saying they believe a rapid withdrawal would serve Israeli and Western interests better than a prolonged American stay in Iraq.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, "in what could be an indication of slowly shifting Saudi attitudes toward Israel, Dr. Zoher Hareji, a Saudi representative appeared on Thursday "for what may have been the first time on a television panel discussion with an official Israeli spokesperson" -- Olmert's spokeswoman Miri Eisin. The two discussed the Saudi peace initiative and other regional issues from Jeddah and Tel Aviv studios of Al Hurra-TV.

Israel Radio reported that the IDF's Advocate-General, Avihai Mandelblit, has ordered an investigation into alleged forbidden actions by IDF troops in Nablus, who reportedly used the "neighbor procedure" against residents of the city two weeks ago. The alleged violation was first reported by AP.

The three major Hebrew-language dailies led with remarks made by Olmert in a speech to his Kadima party's governing council. Olmert was quoted as saying: "I am an unpopular prime minister, the polls say so." However, he added: "I intend to be working for you for a long time yet." He cited what he said were the proper decisions he made during last summer's war in Lebanon.

Yediot and Israel Radio reported that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have reached agreement on new sanctions to be imposed on Iran. The radio, which reported that Germany is part of those efforts, said that the draft resolution does not include a total embargo on arms to Iran. Israel Radio said that UN member states are required to use restraint regarding sales of aircraft, tanks, and over heavy weapons to Iran. The radio reported that it as resolved to freeze the assts of 13 companies and organizations,

and of 25 individuals -- half of them officers in Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Israel Radio also reported that French Defense Minister Michele Alliot-Marie has called to solve the Iran crisis through diplomatic means, as a military action might set ablaze the entire Muslim world.

Speaking on Israel Radio this morning, Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh said that Israel should negotiate with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas, in accordance with the guidelines of the Palestinian unity government's guidelines. Sneh was quoted as saying that Abbas should bring the conclusions of such talks to a referendum, which Sneh said is the only way to remove Hamas from power.

Leading media reported that, as the Palestinian negotiations concluded late on Wednesday, Hamas and Fatah forces traded fire in the northern Gaza Strip, killing one Fatah fighter and wounding nine people, including five bystanders, according to security officials. This morning Israel Radio reported that militants shot a Palestinian officer to death in the Gaza Strip.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Yitzhak Levanon, Israeli Ambassador to the UN institutions in Geneva, told the newspaper on Thursday that the UN' Human Rights Council is looking to appoint John Dugard as a permanent investigator on Israel's actions in the territories, which he has in the past.

Leading media noted that an increasing number of Labor Party MKs and officials tend to support former PM Ehud Barak.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) cited the outrage of foreign journalist over a Government Press Office requirement that they fill a form asking them to disclose the purpose of their visit.

A Yediot headline about Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, reads: "Satan's Confession."

The Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz reported that on Thursday Edgar Bronfman, President of the World Jewish Congress, unexpectedly announced the dismissal of Rabbi Israel Singer, a leader in the congress and Jewish circles. The media wrote that officials from the Israeli and European branches expressed outrage at the decision and threatened to pull out of the organization.

Maariv reported that Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio, who concluded his visit to Israel on Thursday, met with Vice PM Shimon Peres for several hours on Sunday. The newspaper reported that the two discussed the peace process and various environment-related issues.

-----  
1. Mideast:  
-----

Summary:  
-----

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner and diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "What Livni did this week, and which Rice echoed to some extent in her remarks after their meeting, was to propose to the [Arab] leaders that they reverse the order [of the Saudi initiative]."

Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: " Israel should not reject the Saudi initiative. Without the right-of-return component, it is a serious and worthy proposal."

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote from Ramallah in Ha'aretz: "To the Palestinians, the unity government is the only way to stop the street battles."

Block Quotes:  
-----

I. "Waiting For the Cherry Trees to Blossom"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner and diplomatic correspondent

Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/16): "The fact of the matter, says a senior Israeli official, is that it is necessary to welcome the idea inherent in the Saudi initiative and that the Arab world is prepared to accept Israel. However, the refugee problem is stuck like a bone in everyone's throat. Israel will not agree to absorb even a single refugee in its territory, but the Arab League cannot concede on this issue, which is most sacred to the Palestinians. What Livni did this week, and which Rice echoed to some extent in her remarks after their meeting, was to propose to the leaders that they reverse the order. Instead of waiting with the normalization for Israeli-Palestinian peace -- normalize now, and thus help advance the peace process, Rice said that there is a 'clear need for an Israeli-Arab reconciliation to accompany... the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.' Note that she said 'to accompany' -- that is, there is not necessarily a need to wait for it to come only afterwards."

## II. "Peace or Fraud?"

Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (3/16): "The [Saudi] offer naturally includes recognition of Israel. But it is not sure which Israel the Arab states are prepared to recognize. If it is Israel as a Jewish state -- in accordance with the [1947] United Nations Resolution -- the initiative should be praised. But if its major demand is for the right of return [of Palestinian refugees], this does not constitute recognition of the state of Israel, but a deception.... The stalemate may lead to the elimination, albeit gradual, of Israel -- a Jewish and democratic state in favor of the dream of 'one large state. The right of return on the Palestinian side and the settlement drive on the Israeli side also lead to the same nightmare.... This is why Israel should not reject the Saudi initiative. Without the right-of-return component, it is a serious and worthy proposal."

## III. "The Only Alternative Is Civil War"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote from Ramallah in Ha'aretz (3/16): "The news that a Palestinian unity government had finally been formed brought a sigh of relief to Ramallah, coming as it did after long months of negotiations, bloodshed and fears of civil war. In meetings with acquaintances here on Thursday, I heard not a single word of criticism or disappointment -- only hope. 'What's important to us now is that there be a little quiet and we stop killing each other,' explained a doctor at the new Sheikh Zaid hospital. To the Palestinians, the unity government is the only way to stop the street battles. Whether or not it is a good government, or how Israel deals with it, are less important: The only alternative is civil war.... One can certainly find indications in this government of flexibility and pragmatism on Hamas's part: For instance, none of the Hamas ministers arrested by Israel following [IDF Corporal Gilad] Shalit's abduction are included in it. Why not? A senior Palestinian journalist explained: 'Because they want to be practical. They want the new government to function well, and not to be only a national symbol.'"

## 12. Iraq:

### Summary:

Deputy Managing Editor Anshel Pfeffer wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The Eastern Front [may] once again become a threat for Israel."

### Block Quotes:

#### "The Return of the Eastern Front"

Deputy Managing Editor Anshel Pfeffer wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (3/16): "Four years ago, when the United States and Great Britain brought Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq to an end, there was a collective sigh of relief within

the Israeli defense establishment.... Two facts, though, seem unavoidable. Any prospective president planning to win the November 2008 US election will have to promise a clear time frame for extricating American troops. And whenever that evacuation is over, there will still be sizable groups of terrorists of various stripes and colors holding out who will celebrate the US departure as their victory. At that moment, the Eastern Front will once again become a threat for Israel."

JONES